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FRUCTUS ARBORIS VITÆ.

BY PERSIS E. DARROW.

CANTO FIRST.

Ye angels, who the balmy sweets of Eden taste,
Who linger by Celestial fountains pure and chaste,
Oh! lend your gracious ears, by heavenly choiring blest,
The while with touch unskilled my humble harp is pressed;
And what discordant in my simple song there be
O teach me, angels, to resolve to harmony!

'Tis morn in Eden. Pearly drops in splendor shine
On fragrant verdure, lighted by His face divine,
As though the myriad angels at their matin prayer
Had told their sacred beads and left them shining there.
The zephyrs waft sweet strains of melodies unwrit
From angel lips; such music mortal men ne'er wit.
And to accompany the hymn sublime I ween
A thousand harps Æolian were placed between
The neighboring shoots on every vine and shrub and tree.
Fair through the garden's midst a stream immortals see
To flow, proceeding from Jehovah's awful throne,
Full in whose waters clear the tree of Life is shown,
Which bears twelve sorts of fruit upon its branches wide,
And whose leaves are for healing; and beside
The tree of Life the fateful tree of knowledge stands,
On tasting which Eve disobeyed just God's commands.

'Tis morn in Eden, but the holy angels' joy
 First since eternity began hath known allow
 For mother Eve has tasted of the fruit forbid
 And Eve and Adam from God's face in fear are hid.
 'Twas then, before God's wrath 'gainst man was e'er out-poured,
 Before was placed around the tree of Life the sword,
 That hell-born Satan took the form of gentle dove,
 And thus indued in semblance fair of peace and love
 Swift to the tree of Life he winged his crafty flight,
 And with the oarage of his pinions soft and white
 He skimmed the vast ethereal sea and made descent
 To earth; to give immortal life to mortal man intent.

A thousand years are passed, but yet the watchful Prince
 Of Darkness hath not found occasion to evince
 His direful mind; and up and down the face of earth
 He stalks deceitly, biding till he may give birth
 To his design 'neath stars auspicious and serene.
 In all the varied shapes of beasts he had been seen,
 And all the birds of air that flit with tireless wing,
 The fish of seas, and every horrid creeping thing,
 Except of Man; and now behold, a wood within,
 In human dress the machinator of all sin.

The day is over and the evening star hath fled
 Behind the bold, protecting mount with hasty tread
 Fast followed by the silver moon whose shining mail
 Sheds over all the wood and glade a radiance pale.
 Crouched low beside a stream that through the forest ran
 With haggard face and eyes astare a starving man
 The devil sees. Some hunter who hath lost his way
 And 'mong the caverns wild and sombre many a day
 Hath dwelt, still seeking some home, till black despair at length
 By gradual approaches hath despoiled his strength,
 And famishing he prays, "O, great God, let me die!"
 "Ah! would to me," the devil said, "might be that cry!"
 And forth from in his breast the fruit of Life he drew,
 "For I give life instead of death to such as you."

Up leaped the hunter madly at the wonderous sight,
 And at the devil blindly flew for battle dight;
 But soon he calmed beneath the other's steady gaze
 And hearkened to his words of guile with deep amaze
 "Alas!" he sighed, in doleful tone, "How sad a fate
 Within this forest old for me doth lie in wait
 To snatch my life! for, truly, all that intervenes

Between grim Death and these scarce less distracting scenes
 Is but this fruit ; and now my little all I give
 That while I die a man more miserable may live.
 Pray, eat ; and, haply, some fair chance ere its digest
 Will bring thee aid ;" and into his gaunt hand he pressed
 The treacherous fruit, and from the hunter's wondering face
 With mighty strides he hence betook himself apace.

The fatal fruit already lay upon his jaw
 When suddenly the famished man before him saw
 A presence bright all in celestial beauty dressed,
 And tremblingly he fell before the vision blest
 Upon his face, and faint as in a dream he heard
 To fall upon his heavy ear this warning word :
 "'Tis Satan bids thee taste the fruit of lasting life ;
 Prolong not through eternity this human strife ;"
 And silence fell. And when he raised at last his head
 And feebly gazed about once more, by impulse led
 He turned his glazing orbs to where there perched anear
 A dusky bird, dim outlined in the shadows drear ;
 And slow approaching on his weak and stiffened knees
 He painfully at length contrived his prey to seize ;
 And savagely he tore the quivering flesh apart,
 And drained the living blood from the still beating heart.

The morning dawns ; and as the shades of darkness fly
 A band of hunters who awake with startled cry
 The denizens of wood, descry beside the stream
 The prostrate object of their seeking by the beam
 Of early day ; and tenderly their burden bear
 To fireside blest where waiteth love and tender care.
 By slow degrees his waxing strength to him returned,
 And with new life, within his breast the longing burned
 To see once more the fruit of Life and in his hand
 To feel its touch. Anon his keen, alert eye scanned
 The mossy brink wherever the hunter band had spied
 Their comrade fainting, full the purling stream beside.
 Eureka ! there it yet reposeth fair and sound
 As though from over-bending bough it had but bound
 The moment past ; and, as to strengthen this belief,
 Fast to its slender stem still clung the faithful leaf.

Should he but eat ! to linger after friend and foe,
 Till children's children the procession sad and slow
 That moveth to the Better Land should join, and then
 To ardent onward press with ranks of coming men ;

And still the goal, like mirage o'er the desert bleached
 Be ever seeming near but never, never reached —
 To hope the same sweet hope till hope itself grows tame —
 To love until the heart inured the subtle flame
 No more doth know than crumbling ashes dead and gray
 Perceive the gallant flames that round them leap and play—
 Alone to ever roam the earth without a mate —
 To feel no loving soul in Heaven doth glad await
 His coming — to bear upon his shoulders weak
 And yielding all the weight of ages drear and bleak —
 From hunger, thirst, and pain, and sorrow no release —
 To wage eternal warfare with no luring peace
 In vision sweet his heart to cheer. With spiteful toss
 He cast the cursed fruit of Life upon the moss.

But still he could not tempt his fixed feet from the spot,
 And as he tarried, musing deep, there came the thought
 Of worldly power, and wealth, and fame — new lands to know,
 New wonders of earth, sky and depths of sea below
 That Science should disclose — to watch inventious spring
 Like seeds to life, until the laden tree should fling
 Its precious fruitage from the bough, and all the earth
 Should gather to its store with thankful song and mirth,
 To sort out wisdom from the rubbish-pile of lore
 That worldlings con, until from shore to sounding shore
 Of all he should be wisest deemed — to ever frame
 Vast undertakings undisturbed by futile claim
 Of grudging Time — the truth of prophecy to view,
 And nearer to the deathless fruit a step he drew,
 "If this from bliss of Heaven debar 'tis no less sure
 From all the miseries of Hell a lasting cure."
 And warnings all forgot, in but an instant more
 He seized the spurned fruit and cleft it to the core.
 Then in the quiet stream that wended to the sea
 He hauled the fruit perforce, lest all should be death free.

CANTO SECOND.

The ages haste ; yet undisturbed as on their way
 The flying centuries speed by from ave to ave,
 He stands like some bold, jagged cliff that midst the roar
 Of ocean sees the ships to pass forever more.
 Not Afric's arid waste, nor Zembla's frigid clime,

The frozen Arctic sea, nor India's pools of slime
 His steps retard. Upon the earth no slighted rod
 Remains, which bears not printed on its yielding sod
 Or restless sand, or snow, his passing foot. Afar
 To North as where shines vertical the Polar star
 He roamed and explored; and onward till to sight [night
 Entranced, the Southern Cross bedecks the star-gemmed
 He pressed. Each lofty mount where under southern sun
 They bear upon their slopes four seasons blent in one;
 The fair Italian vales, and fragrant English lanes,
 Hibernia's lakes, and Albin's braes, the fertile plains
 America's bequest, his presence knew. The isles
 That flattened by the sea's caress receive with smiles
 Upon their genial shores the wanderer; the sea
 Heroic, fond and gay, false-hearted though he be,
 He traversed o'er and o'er till naught was strange and new,
 And every land to him was home; all tongues he knew.

The earth her treasure yielded up like artless maid
 That gives her love for asking. Every mine repaid
 His labor seven fold. The fecund soil its fruit
 Heaped up as though an altar pure were every shoot
 That issued forth. The mighty sun in every zone
 Like those who serve for love, his lord's will made his own.
 The winds, capricious, that the waters frolic o'er
 Their sport deferred to bear his ships from shore to shore.
 The ages haste; anon his blurred eyes view aghast,
 The wreck of ships of state upon the Syrtes cast.
 Again from Ilium does wanton Paris fly;
 Again the crafty Greeks illumine the frightened sky
 That watches over Troy; and now a heathen band
 Has sacked the fanes and temples of the Holy Land.
 His tingling ears the groans of Poland's sons oppressed
 Smite, till amid the fearful din no rest
 His soul can find; and to the conflict's heat and brunt
 Wronged Justice silent points and bids him to the front.
 No cumbrous weight of steel confined his arms imbued
 With Russian blood. Hard pressed he neither gave nor sued
 For quarter; but o'er writhing heaps of fallen men
 He forced his clashing way and charged and charged again.
 Alas! the thinning ranks no more can hold their own
 And in the midst of frantic foes he fought alone.
 But still their hostile strokes could not his strength o'erpower;
 But, heart-sick at his comrade's fate, he fled the shower
 Of missiles falling thick, and, weeping, from the grave
 He turned away of Poland, that he fought to save.

Not Poland that on page historical we see,
But twice ten thousand Polands that are yet to be.

Now on fair Nature's face he sees the trace of years.

The avalanche, the earthquake shock assail his ears.

Volcanoes pour forth fiery floods of molten stone.

Mad fires leap up that sport round dusky Vulcan's throne.

He sees the devastation in the cyclone's wake.

Vast floods sweep o'er the helpless earth and havoc make

Of flowery isles, and sunny slopes, and pleasant meads.

He sees the subtler influence of stream that feeds

The ravenous sea, and frost and sun ; but 'mong them all,

Though vast areas upheave and towering mountains fall

Upon the tabid earth forever he must roam.

His jaded, doomed soul can find no other home.

The ages haste. Friend after friend sincere and true

No sooner proves his love than he must bid adieu

To this brief transient life to share the purer love

Of all the blessed company that dwell above.

His heart a thousand times bereft within him shrunk,

And in his agony of soul adown he sunk

Upon the earth and hid his face. "Alas!" he cried,

"That I, alone, of all my race must here abide

Forever more. That ne'er my wretched eyes should see

Aught but these loathsome scenes, made fair to all but me

By thought they must be yielded up. Alas! that I

The cursed fruit did taste. Who says to never die

Is to remain on earth, says false, as false as hell!

'Tis death to live apart from those we love full well."

As thus he prostrate wailed there passed him mocking by

Young lovers gay, and blushing maidens sweet and sly,

White headed sires, and grand-dames slow, who on him turned

Their railing eye with laugh and jest. His rived heart burned

With fury uncontrolled, remorse, and shame, despair,

And all emotions deep and dark that serve to tear

The breast of man. And with a mighty groan their sight

He fled, and to the tangled wilderness took flight.

Beneath the silent sky he lived again each year

That ages gone he lived with wife and children dear,

Till over-tortured heart for anguish scarce could beat

And death and darkness seized his soul. A vision sweet

At length he dimly saw, as from his stupor back

To consciousness he drifted slow. The gloom and black

Was from his spirit passed away, and in its stead
 The morning light of love and sweet contentment shed
 Its golden blessings. Welcome death was come it seemed;
 Death long un hoped for, long implored for, often dreamed.
 His wife, and children, parents, friends, he saw — embraced.
 No exile from his loved country torn and placed
 On hated shores, but free and pure he wandered there
 At home, in Heaven — so he thought. But Ah! despair
 Again his soul invaded farther than before;
 'Twas but a dream of bliss, a vision. It was o'er.

A new desire takes full possession of his breast.
 He lingers not. He pushes to the East, to West;
 He seeks the North, South — every land; but searches most
 When playful waves steal slyly to the sandy coast.
 Among the shells and seaweed ceaselessly he peers,
 Now hopefully, despairing now, the while the years
 Still roll. The fruit of Life so rudely flung aside.
 He yearns to spy, borne safely landward by the tide;
 For deathless, as himself, he knoweth well there lies
 Upon some tossing crest or level strand his prize.
 More eagerly than ship-wrecked sailor strains his eyes
 To catch some glimpse of vessel where the stormy skies
 The ocean meet, he strives once more a glimpse to gain
 Of that dread fruit, the cause of all his woe and pain.

The ages haste. His eye upon the surging main
 Agape, has recognized afar the fruit again.
 The billows bear it on — he cannot wait, but leaps
 With throbbing pulse and brain aw whirl into the deeps.
 'Tis his! for cycles past no joy his heart hath known,
 But now his unsealed lids shed tears upon the stone
 Whereon he stands — wild tears of joy and gladness. Out
 Into the world he dashes with one grating shout
 Of triumph. His the mission dark to lead astray
 A brother man; to cause his misery for aye.

The ages haste. By all allurements deft and nice
 Unto eternal pain he striveth to entice
 The sons of earth; brave youth in whom life's love is strong,
 Decrepit age whose wasted life is passed in wrong,
 And who beseeches wildly to retrace his way
 And live again in rectitude each miss-spent day,
 The rich and poor, the high and low — 'tis all for naught
 Some magic influence seems fated to athwart
 His fiendish hope. The anxious, over-bending skies
 Rejoice. From Nature's heart glad hallelujahs rise.

The ages haste. As when a body all the rays
Of light absorbs, 'tis dark to the beholder's gaze,
'Twas thus his mind that every tint and shade and hue
Of bliss and anguish, peace and tormentation knew
Became as black and blank as night. Day after day,
Year after year, upon his couch he torpid lay.
No note he took of time or great events occurred;
No loving voice of friend his ear half-deafened heard:
By charity watched over, naught he knew of all;
No longer good or evil to his lot might fall.
The baneful fruit was ever in his hand, although
E'en what it was his mind beclouded did not know,
But as in dreams the sleeper seizeth on a fold
And clutcheth tight, and feareth to relax his hold
Lest some calamity ensue, so he his grip
Upon the fruit retained and dared not let it slip.
Anon like pining child that to its mouth commits
Whatever lies at hand and no distinction wits,
The leaf that heals the nations from its stem he tore
And to his ready mouth with shaking fingers bore.
And lo! the cursed fruit the leaf annulleth, blest,
And from his living death at last he sinks to rest.

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